

## Our Lady of Lourdes

On Thursday, 11 February 1858, fourteen-year-old Bernadette was sent with her younger sister and a friend to gather firewood, when a very beautiful lady appeared to her above a rose bush in a grotto called **Massabielle** (*Tuta de Massavielha*).



St-Bernadette Soubirous with her two friends between April and July 1858

The woman wore blue and white and smiled at Bernadette before making the sign of the cross with a rosary of ivory and gold. Bernadette fell to her knees, took out her own rosary and began to pray. Bernadette later described the woman as “*uo petito damizelo*” (meaning “a small young lady”). Though her sister and friend claimed they were unable to see her, Bernadette knew what she saw was real.

Three days later, Bernadette, her sister Marie, and other girls returned to the grotto, where Bernadette immediately knelt, saying she could see “*aquero*” again. She fell into a trance and one girl threw holy water at the niche and another threw a rock that shattered on the ground. It was then that the apparition disappeared.

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, Bernadette said “*the vision*” asked her to return to the grotto each day for a fortnight. With each visit, Bernadette saw the **Virgin Mary** and the period of daily visions became known as “*la Quinzaine sacrée*” (meaning “*holy fortnight*”).

When Bernadette began to visit the grotto, her parents were embarrassed and attempted to stop her, but were unable to do so. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, Bernadette claimed to have had a life-changing vision.

The vision had told her “to drink of the water of the spring, to wash in it and to eat the herb that grew there” as an act of penance. The next day, the grotto’s muddy waters had been cleared and fresh clear water flowed.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the thirteenth of the apparitions, Bernadette told her family the lady said “a chapel should be built and a procession formed.”

During her sixteenth vision, which Bernadette claims to have experienced for over an hour, was on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Bernadette claimed she had asked the woman her name, but her question was only met with a smile. Bernadette asked again, three more times, and finally the woman said, “*I am the Immaculate Conception.*”

Though many townspeople believed she had indeed been seeing the Holy Virgin, *Bernadette’s story* created a division in her town. Many believed she was telling the truth, while others believed she had a mental illness and demanded she be put in a mental asylum. Some believed Bernadette’s visions meant she needed to pray for penance.

Church authorities and the French government rigorously interviewed the girl, and by 1862 they confirmed she spoke truth. Since Bernadette first caused the spring to produce clean water, 69 cures have been verified by the **Lourdes Medical Bureau**, and after what the Church claimed were “extremely rigorous scientific and medical examinations,” no one was able to explain what caused the cures.

The **Lourdes Commission** that initially examined Bernadette, ran an analysis on the water but were only able to determine it contained a high mineral content. Bernadette believed it was faith and prayer that was responsible for curing the sick.

Bernadette asked the local priest to build a chapel at the site of her visions - and the **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes** is now one of the major Catholic pilgrimage sites in the world. Many other chapels and churches have been built around it, including the **Basilica of St. Pius X**, which can accommodate 25,000 people and was dedicated by the future **Pope John XXIII** when he was the Papal Nuncio to France.

Following the miracles and constructions, Bernadette decided she did not like the attention she was getting and went to the hospice school run by the **Sisters of Charity of Nevers**, where she was taught to read and write. Though she considered joining the **Carmelites**, her health was too fragile.

On 29 July 1866, Bernadette took the religious habit of a postulant and joined the **Sisters of Charity** at their motherhouse at Nevers. Her **Mistress of Novices** was **Sister Marie Therese Vauzou** and the **Mother Superior** at the time named her **Marie-Bernardé**, in honor of her grandmother.

Bernadette spent the rest of her life there working as an infirmary assistant, and later a sacristan. People admired her humility and spirit of sacrifice. A nun once asked her if she had temptations of pride because she was favored by the Blessed Mother. “How can I?” she answered quickly. “The Blessed Virgin chose me only because I was the most ignorant.”

Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with *tuberculosis of the bone* in her right knee and was unable to take part in convent life. She died in the **Ste-Croix (Holy Cross) Infirmary** of the **Convent of St-Gildard** at the age of 35 on 16 April 1879, while praying the holy rosary.

Even on her deathbed Bernadette suffered *severe pain* and, keeping with the Virgin Mary’s admonition of “Penance, Penance, Penance,” she proclaimed “all this is good for Heaven!” Bernadette’s last words were, “Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me. A poor sinner, a poor sinner.”

The nuns of St-Gildard, with the support of the bishop of Nevers, applied to the civil authorities for permission to bury Bernadette’s body in a small chapel dedicated to St-Joseph, which was within the confines of the convent. Permission was granted on 25 April 1879, and on April 30<sup>th</sup>, the local Prefect pronounced his approval of the choice of the site for burial. On 30 May 1879, Bernadette’s coffin was transferred to the crypt of the **chapel of St Joseph**, where a very

simple ceremony was held to commemorate the event.

Thirty years later, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, two doctors and a sister of the community **exhumed** her body. They claimed the crucifix and rosary she carried had been oxidized but her body remained incorrupt. The incorruption was cited as one of the miracles supporting her canonization.

The group washed and redressed Bernadette’s body then buried it in a **new double casket**. The Church **exhumed** her body again on 3 April 1919, and the doctor who examined her said, “The body is practically mummified, covered with patches of mildew and quite a notable layer of salts, which appear to be calcium salts... the skin has disappeared in some places, but it is still present on most parts of the body.”

In 1925, Bernadette’s body was **exhumed** yet again. This time relics were sent to Rome and an imprint of her face was molded, which was used to create a wax mask to be placed on her body. There were *also*

imprints of her hands to be used for the presentation of her body, which was placed in a gold and crystal reliquary in the *Chapel of Saint Bernadette* at the mother house in Nevers.

In 1928, Doctor Comte published a report on Bernadette's exhumation in the second issue of the *Bulletin de l'Association medicale de Notre-Dame de Lourdes*, where he wrote:

"I would have liked to open the left side of the thorax to take the ribs as relics and then remove the heart which I am certain must have survived. However, as the trunk was slightly supported on the left arm, it would have been rather difficult to try and get at the heart without doing too much noticeable damage.

As the Mother Superior had expressed a desire for the Saint's heart to be kept together with the whole body, and as Monsignor the Bishop did not insist, I gave up the idea of opening the left-hand side of the thorax and contented myself with removing the two right ribs which were more accessible.

What struck me during this examination, *of course*, was the state of perfect preservation of the skeleton, the fibrous tissues of the muscles (still supple and firm), of the ligaments, and of the skin, and above all the totally unexpected state of the liver after 46 years. One would have thought that this organ, which is basically soft and inclined to crumble, would have decomposed very rapidly or would have hardened to a chalky consistency. Yet, when it was cut it was soft and almost normal in consistency. I pointed this out to those present, remarking that this did not seem to be a natural phenomenon."

St-Bernadette is often depicted in prayer with a rosary or appealing to the Holy Virgin. She was beatified in 1925 and canonized by Pope Pius XI in December 1933. St-Bernadette is the patroness of illness, people ridiculed for their piety, poverty, shepherds, shepherdesses, and Lourdes, France.

Long before the advent of the European, the site of St. Laurent was popular as a camping ground both because of its spring and its ravine, ideal as a buffalo pit. When the traders set up their "store-forts" on the South Saskatchewan, the Atsena or the Gros-Ventrés were in possession of the narrow strip of land between the two rivers, from the elbow of the North Saskatchewan to the fork.

On December 5, 1821, the Hudson's Bay was conceded the monopoly of the fur trade at Carlton House. Four tribes of native Canadians were bartering in this area: the Crees, the Assiniboin or Stone Indians, the Maskegons and the Saulteaus (and even sometimes the Blackfoot).

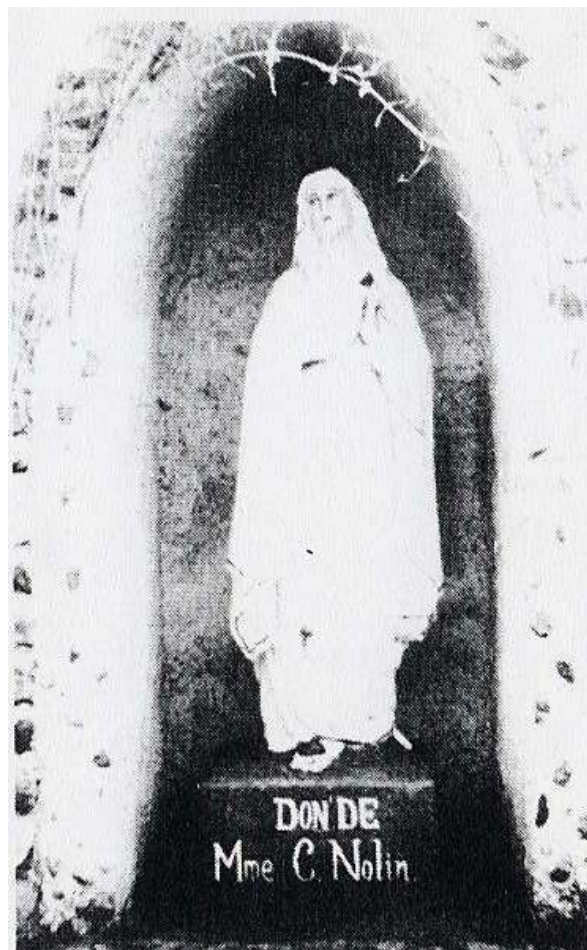
The first Catholic Missionaries arrived at Carlton House on August 18, 1838. Father Norbert Blanchet and Father Modeste Demers celebrated mass, preached, heard confessions and performed thirty-two baptisms and seven weddings during their short stay. Among the newly baptized were five adults and three children belonging to the family of Patrick Small, clerk in charge of the fort. These temporary religious sojourners are of real interest to the Church in Western Canada and the U.S.A. Father Francois Norbert Blanchet was born at St. Pierre, Rivière du Sud on Sept. 3, 1785. He was ordained on July 18, 1819 and was parish priest at Les Cedres near Montreal before he set off for the West on May 13, 1838. He joined Father Modeste Demers who had waited one year at St. Boniface for him. Together they left the Red River on July 28, 1838 travelling in the company of the botanists Banks and Wallace. Father Demers was born at St. Nicolas in October, 1809 and was ordained on Feb. 7, 1836. He had left Montreal in April 1837. The two priests finally reached Fort Vancouver on November 24. Blanchet was consecrated bishop of Oregon City on July 25, 1845 and Demers was consecrated first bishop of Vancouver Island on Nov. 30, 1847. They both died on July 18, 1883.

Four years later, on May 26, 1842, Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault navigating the southern branch of the Saskatchewan camped on what a half century later would be the site of St. Laurent. The next day, he celebrated mass on the spot before going on to Fort Carlton. From that day Carlton House became a regular stopping place for many missionaries. This missionary was born at St. Joseph of Levis on Dec. 14, 1810 and ordained at St. Boniface on Sept. 8, 1833. He later became Bishop Provencher's Vicar General and from 1842 to 1852 made several trips West. He died at St. Denis. Kamouraska, Quebec on April 4, 1879.

By 1860, the need for religious leadership at Fort Carlton became so apparent that Father Julian Moulin O.M.I. of the Île a la Crosse Mission was sent in response to the cry for help. This was no easy feat; it took him twelve days on foot in December to reach Carlton House. During the next five winters he walked the same trail in the same difficult circumstances to minister to the inmates of the Fort. The determination and self-sacrifice of these early missionaries is a real marvel. Father Julian Moulin O.M.I. was born in Denan, France on Jan. 16, 1832. He joined the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and was ordained by its founder, Bishop Charles Eugene de Mazenod in 1857. He left France immediately to arrive at the Red River Colony in 1858. After spending sometime in St. Boniface, he was posted to Ile a la Crosse from where he visited at difficult times Carlton House, Green Lake, and St. Laurent. He accompanied the people on the buffalo hunt several times. He was in charge of Batoché from 1883 to 1914 and finally died at St. Albert, Alberta in 1920.

In 1868 St. Joseph's Station at Carlton House was transferred from the care of Ile a la Crosse to that of St. Paul of the Cree Mission (St. Paul, Alberta). The missionaries' work was thwarted due to circumstances such as brawls, drunken revelry and crime at the fort. This was the situation in which Father Alexis Andre found himself. While he was present religious fervour filled the fort only to leave with his physical absence. But in 1870 a convincing preacher appeared in form of an epidemic which took thirty-two lives out of the sixty inmates of the fort and the work of the missionary was facilitated.

Father Alexis Andre was a Breton born at Guipavas in the diocese of Quimper, France on July 17, 1833. He made his novitiate at Nancy and was professed on Feb. 17, 1860. He arrived at the Red River Colony on Oct. 26, 1861 from where he was sent to Pembina. In Dec. 1863 he received from the American Government a mission of pacifying the Sioux. In 1865 he left the Red River for St. Albert, (Alberta) and in 1868 he received his obedience for St. Paul of the Crees Mission (Alberta). From there he visited Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt.



Statue donated by Mr. Charles Nolin  
Place Name: St. Laurent

Mr. Charles Nolin donated a statue for the cure of his wife, who has suffered many years from hemorrhages. Under the guidance of Brother Piquet, on the evening December 16th, 1884, a novena to Our Lady was started. By the end of the nine days Mrs. Nolin's pain disappeared without leaving a trace of the disease. For Father Fourmond and Brother Piquet, that unexpected cure was an answer of the Blessed Virgin to calm their anxiety. Mary would consequently have her statue, her grotto, and her pilgrimages.

In the late 1860's, the Province of Manitoba was being invaded by Ontario colonists and other English speaking people resulting in the increase of the westward exodus of the Metis. They set out in carts in long caravans of thirty or forty families for what they imagined to be a land of never failing and ever ready resources. In the autumn of 1870 one of these caravans stopped on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in order to prepare its winter quarters. On the wedge of the land shaped by a horse-shoe conformation of the river, they erected some thirty log huts which were given the title of "Petite Ville" (Small Town). These travelers felt remoteness from spiritual help so communicated their anxiety to Bishop Grandin who encouraged them to appeal to the mission of Ile a la Crosse. The result was that Father Moulin O.M.I. after a difficult journey of some two hundred and fifty miles found himself settling down for the winter in a small hut in "Petite Ville." Since the idea of a permanent mission had not yet crystallized he left them for Reindeer Lake in the spring. After his departure in 1871 Bishop Grandin charged Father Alexis Andre to accompany the struggling colony on its buffalo hunt. On his arrival, his first act was to dedicate his new post to St. Laurent. After the summer hunting, he returned to St. Albert for the annual retreat but returned to the "Petite Ville" on October 8 accompanied by Father Bourguine. The missionaries were content with life in their poor hut since they were amply compensated by the religious fervor of the Métis which they wrote reminded them of the piety and tranquility of a religious house.

### 1871

After a meeting held on December 31, 1871, it was decided to move the settlement. Father Andre then purchased some land and took possession of it by planting a cross. But he could not do anything till the Bishop's visitation. Life in the small hut had become intolerable, due to physical conditions. Father Bourguine's health suffered. Bishop Grandin arrived at "Petite Ville" on May 19. After some arguments from Father Andre he conceded them the right to set up a permanent mission. Thus in the summer of 1873 "Petite Ville" was transported to the actual site of the St. Laurent mission. The new site was a sandy plain, very poor for cultivation but there was a spring of good water half-way up the hill and a river ford which led to the other shore where the traces of the two 1804 forts could be seen. To the north it was bordered by a deep ravine, flanked by a steep escarpment, "The buffalo pit".

### 1874

In the spring of 1874, Father Andre's five or six log buildings plastered with clay white wash, and thatched with hay sprang up in spite of many difficulties. The shed-like church could barely hold sixty persons. A benefactor of the St. Laurent mission was Mr. Lawrence Clarke who was born in county Cork in 1832 and entered the service of the Hudson's Bay in 1851 at Montreal. He became a factor in 1858 and the chief factor of the Saskatchewan District in 1878. This man spared nothing to come to the assistance of the missionaries with numerous gifts of money and advice when they were facing the difficulties involving the establishment of the mission. It was he that donated the fine bell to St. Laurent, and which Bishop Grandin baptized Geroldine Henriette on August 15, 1875. He died in Prince Albert in 1890.

### 1875

On June 6, 1875 Father Bourguine was replaced by Father Vital Fourmond O.M.I., who was never to leave St. Laurent. Father Vital Fourmond was born March 17, 1828 at Arou, Bas-Maine and ordained June 5, 1852. He ministered in the diocese of Mans. He left France on April 25, 1868, made his novitiate at St. Albert (Alberta) and professed his perpetual vows November 1, 1869. He was stationed at Lake St. Ann and during that time suffered through an epidemic of small pox with his

people. In 1873 he spent time evangelizing the Blackfoot with Father Scollen at the direction of Father Leduc.

On January 18, 1875 Bishop Grandin announced his placement to St. Laurent where he arrived on June 8 to take over the care of the mission. Thus Father Andre was freed to exercise his most original character and Christian zeal. His attention was first directed towards Duck Lake, where in 1876 he founded the Mission of Sacred Heart. Mr. Douglas Stobart had just established a trading-post there. In 1877 Battleford became the capital of the North-West Territories. There Bishop Grandin sent Father Andre to help out till Father Lestanc O.M.I. was able to take charge of this center. He proceeded to Sandy Lake to preach to the Crees of that area. From this activity resulted the founding at Muskeg Lake, the Mission of our Lady of the Sacred Heart, by Father Moulin and from there he took charge of Sandy Lake.

In 1879 Father Andre founded the Mission of St. George at the little hamlet of Prince Albert. In October 1882 he was definitely stationed at this post and returned to St. Laurent. Meanwhile Father Valentine Vegreville had arrived at St. Laurent to assist Father Fourmond. It was Father Vegreville who founded in 1880 midway between Fort Carlton and Stobart that Mission of St. Anthony of Padua at Batoché. While there he lived with the family of Xavier LeTendré, surnamed Batoché. It was Father Moulin who was in charge of building the present church. In 1882 he was put in charge of the Mission of St. Louis de Langevin. The Church there was built in 1888 thanks to the zeal of Father Lecoq O.M.I. who to meet the expenses sold his horse, carriage and watch. In 1875, to provide a Christian education for the children, Father Andre had opened a school under the direction of Mr. Norbert Larence who had been a former Superintendent of Public Works under the Assiniboia Government and Justice of Peace under the Provisional Government (1869-70). The enthusiasms of the first days of the school were of short duration. In 1877 Métis opposed to French and Catechism as a waste of time had the unfinished school building demolished and rebuilt on the other shore of the river away from Father's direct influence. Father Fourmond tried to maintain a school but it did not flourish till the arrival of Miss Onesime Dorval in 1881. She succeeded in establishing credibility with the people and the school flourished. Miss Dorval was the first certificated teacher of Saskatchewan.

### 1883

Bishop Grandin had for years contemplated establishment of a boarding school at St. Laurent. After many unsuccessful applications to various teaching communities he wrote to the Faithful Companions of Jesus and so on June 29, 1883, eight religious arrived at St. Laurent, four of whom were to stay (Mother Mary Green, Mother Augustine, Sister Partick and Sister Lucy). The Bishop solemnly blessed the new convent and placed their work under the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The religious at first were coldly received by the people but their charity finally won the day. The school at its height had fifty scholars of which twenty were boarders. It was unfortunate that the first convent in what was to be the diocese of Prince Albert had but a brief existence. In the years 1882-1883 the St. Laurent Mission reached a state of prosperity, both from spiritual and material viewpoints. It had become a model parish and founder of other missions. The nomad life had ceased, cultivation and cattle raising brought, if not abundance, at least sufficiency. But this was not to last.

In 1884, Father Fourmond's journal notes various grievances which indicated that for some time a general uneasiness had reigned in the colony. Father Fourmond's dreams and work were about to be annihilated. The Métis requested a regular survey of their lands and the title-deeds of the little farms which they had settled some ten years previous but the Government turned a deaf ear to their demands. Times were hard: the harvest had failed for the past two years; the buffaloes had completely disappeared; the winter was rigorous; hunger and misery finally embittered the sufferers. Secret meetings were held. Mr. Louis Riel was called back from the United States to take a hand in the affairs. The cooperation of the clergy was sought. Bishop Grandin replied: "If you merely claim the privileges to which, as first occupants, you are entitled, we will side with you. But we would never give our support to a revolution."



On March 18, at 10 p.m. Louis Riel entered Father Fourmond's residence declaring: "The Provisional Government is proclaimed. Henceforward, you must obey me alone. If you do not, the churches will remain, but they will be empty." After threatening and railing against religion he spent the rest of the night assembling under compulsion all able-bodied men in order to concentrate them at Batoché. Riel took possession of the Church of St. Anthony at Batoché. Then in order to establish his hold on the people and to withdraw them from the influence of the clergy, he apostatized and compelled them to follow his direction.

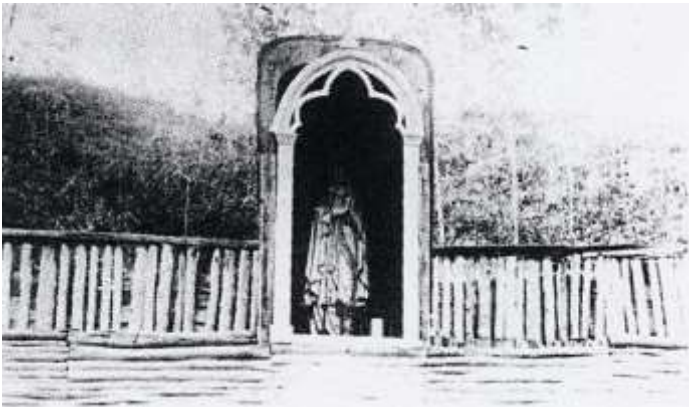
At St. Laurent, the inmates of the mission remained quiet, however when Father Andre's couriers brought the news of the massacre at Frog lake which included Fathers Fafard and Marchand the Sisters of the Coventry fearing for their own safety, attempted to reach Prince Albert but fell into the hands of Riel's allies.

Riel placed the Fathers (Fourmond, Moulin, Vegreville, Touze) under arrest in the Batoché Rectory where they could no longer circulate among the people, receive visitors, or give advice. Several times they were arraigned before the council of war and threatened with being shot by the rebels.

The Mission of St. Laurent, forsaken by its population came near to being put to the torch except for the courage of one man who resisted Riel's messengers and saved the chapel and buildings. This spiritual heroism epitomized by Baptiste Hamelin strikes us as somewhat melodramatic but at the time it was real and authentic; for when he was called to adjure his faith under pain of death he responded: "God gives me the strength to resist your threats and your guns. If a single one of my brothers is bold enough let him strike. You can shoot me, but you can never make me renounce my faith." This was strength of faith that was nourished and flourished under the auspices of Our Lady of Lourdes.

On 7 July 1885 Bishop Grandin arrived for the reconciliation of the apostates. The desertion had been far from general.

On 10 July 1885 Father Leduc and the Faithful companions of Jesus left St. Laurent for Calgary.



First Grotto 1888 to 1907 by Brother Piquet  
Place Name: St. Laurent

In 1890 during the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi, an extraordinary event took place in the attic of the old Convent. On the partition on the right of the staircase, the shadow of a large cross was perceived, showing a clear outline of Our Crucified Lord. It seemed to be projected by the light which shone in through the open window. Miss Odile Pelletier, the teacher, witnessed this shadow with some boarders. She looked around for a plausible explanation, not finding any, she sent word to Father Fourmond, who came and was very moved by what he saw. The cross was visible for several consecutive days. Whatever its portent, the event ushered in a time of most acute anguish, a period of the most lamentable decadence for St. Laurent. The prosperous mission began to crumble away. The forming of new colonies had reduced its population to an insignificant group. Christian principles had received a fatal blow in the rebellion of 1885. Faith had diminished; the Sacraments were no longer frequented except on great feast days. Vespers, processions and benediction were no longer attended. The people began to lead a life of excessive dissipation and indulged in the most revolting misconduct. The formation of the new diocese of Prince

Albert in 1890 was another hardship for Father Fourmond for it separated him from his lifelong friend (since their primary school days at Arou till the seminary of Pressigne) Bishop Vital Grandin. Sickness finally vanquished him. On February 4, 1892 he left the Mission of St. Laurent never to see it again, he died in St. Boniface hospital February 24. Father Andre died in Calgary on January 10, 1893. So, in less than a year, the two founders of the St. Laurent Mission were gone.

Father Vachon O.M.I. continued their work and tried for two years to maintain the Mission but on May 28, 1894 he received orders to return to Prince Albert. In 1894 the site for St. Michael's School was established and Father Paquette was named principal of the school under construction. This event seemed to be the final blow to the St. Laurent Mission. The mother of so many flourishing parishes was then left to become a field of ruins dominated by its hill cemetery.

But there was to be a revival, in 1938 Father Jules Le Chevalier O.M.I. took over the rebuilding of the mission and its present day chapel is on the same site as the old mission. The Calvary of today is a reminder of the old convent where the phenomenon of the Luminous Cross took place.

### History of Shrine

In October 1879 Brother Jean-Pierre-Marie Piquet, lay member of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, arrived at St. Laurent to help Father Fourmond. Brother Piquet was from Arudy which is located about twenty miles from Lourdes. In his childhood he had often seen Rock Massabielle, where the Blessed Virgin had appeared. He even knew Bernadette who was only four years his senior.

Pius IX's proclamation of the Immaculate Conception was issued December 8, 1854 in the Document *Ineffabilis Deus*. The condensed definition is as follows: "The Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, on the completion of her earthly sojourn, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the Universe, that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of Lords (Apoc. 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death."

At the time this stirred a major controversy in the Church and that is why the apparition at Lourdes less than four years later was so extraordinary, for when Bernadette inquired the name of the vision, she was answered, "I am the Immaculate Conception." Thus in the context of the Lourdes apparitions and the constant stream of preternatural wonders which occurred there is found divine confirmation of the dogmatic proclamation. The Immaculate Conception is a strict mystery, not even conceivable apart from revelation. Miracles or wonders are visible signs of divine intervention that lead the well-disposed to believe or strengthen their belief in what cannot be seen, for the same agency producing the phenomena also revealed the doctrine in which atmosphere the phenomena takes place.



St. Laurent Log Church  
Year: 1936

Place Name: St. Laurent

St. Laurent Log Church built in 1936-38 by Joe Perret of Duck Lake. Father Jules Le Chevalier o.m.i. then Parish-Priest

So when Brother Piquet beheld the source of water for the Mission – the spring in the side of the hill, he was reminded strongly of Lourdes. He conveyed his impressions to Father Fourmond and they both formed the habit of going to the spot to pray. The following spring Brother Piquet left the Mission but Father continued his pious pilgrimages to the

spring and encouraged his fellows to pray there also. In 1881 he placed a picture of Our Lady of Lourdes under glass in the bark of a tree located near the spring. The picture could not withstand the elements so Miss Dorval repainted a small statue of Our Lady of Pontmain firmly fixed it in the tree. The teacher and school children tended the sanctuary and the residents of the Mission went to say the Rosary before the Madonna. In July 1882 Brother Piquet returned to the Mission where he directed his life toward the double goal of teaching the children and of erecting a grotto where Our Lady would be glorified. The arrival of Reverend Father Soullier on his Canonical visit put an end to Brother's endeavors since he emphatically disapproved of the work undertaken. He observed the era of pilgrimages had not yet begun for the North West.

Mr. Charles Nolin, a former minister of the Manitoba Legislature and influential member of the Colony did not live far from St. Laurent. His wife had had a wasting sickness for ten years and physicians could not check the progress of the disease. When reading *The Wonders of Lourdes* by H. Lasserre, he became convinced that Our Lady of Lourdes was willing to cure his wife. He set out to find some Lourdes water which he was fortunate to find at the convent at St. Laurent. Brother Piquet advised the sick woman to begin a novena and promise something for example, a statue. Mr. Nolin immediately pledged a statue. So on December 16, 1884, the novena began with a gathering of neighbours. They first sang a Marian hymn of invocation, recited the Holy Rosary, chanted the hymn of Our Lady of Victories, and the litanies of Loretto. Confident and full of fervour was the atmosphere in which the youngest member of the family passed the Lourdes water over the ailing limbs of the patient. Wherever the child's hand passed, a burning sensation was felt, soon after to be followed by immediate comfort. Seeing herself thus suddenly restored to perfect health, Mrs. Nolin wanted then and there to set out for the spring to offer her thanks to the Blessed Virgin. Her husband dissuaded her from going due to the lateness of the hour. They went the next day and continued the novena in thanksgiving till Christmas. Henceforward she enjoyed the most flourishing health till she died on May 29, 1927 at the age of seventy-nine.

For Father Fourmond and Brother Piquet, this unexpected cure was the answer of the Blessed Virgin to calm their anxiety. She would consequently have her statue, her grotto, and her pilgrimages.

Mr. Charles Nolin, even more grateful towards Our Lady, for the protection with which she surrounded him during the countless dangers of the civil war, hastened to fulfill his vow, and at great expense ordered the votive statue. It was temporarily placed in the chapel and blessed on November 1, 1885.

Brother Piquet spent all his spare time preparing a grotto for the statue. From then on the spot became the terminus of processions organized by Father Fourmond.

A lay-brother, Brother Guillet, of Reindeer Lake, who was crippled from a wound in his leg, made a novena and a pilgrimage to the shrine. There on September 21, 1893, his leg was cured and he was able to return to hard work at the Reindeer Lake Mission. As a result of this event the custom of walking from Duck Lake to St. Laurent began. Later he was stationed in Fish Creek in May 1901 from where he threw himself heart and soul into the work begun by Brother Piquet, taking care of the grotto and bringing pilgrims there. Brother Guillet aimed at the day when all the surrounding parishes would assemble at the grotto to honour the Blessed Virgin. So it was at his instigation that the first interparochial pilgrimage was organized on August 15, 1905. About five hundred persons gathered in spite of nasty weather at St. Laurent. They came from Bellevue, Vermillion Lake, Fish Creek, Carlton, Duck Lake and other parishes. The impulse has never slackened.

July 16 was chosen as the pilgrimage date by Reverend Father Ovide Charlebois O.M.I, the future Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin who was at the time principal of the Indian School at Duck Lake. At the 1906 pilgrimage, at the 6 o'clock Mass, Jean-Baptiste Deschamps was suddenly cured of a hernia. The following year a Mrs. Jurko Betznal, of Fish Creek, was suddenly cured of an advanced case of tuberculosis. Several others have declared under oath that they have been witnesses to wonderful cures.

Twenty years after its erection, Brother Piquet's construction proved inadequate so Father Charlebois was obliged to have it taken down and a

new structure was completed on July 3, 1909. In the niche was placed a statue obtained by Father Augusté Lecorre from an American benefactress.

At the pilgrimage of July 16, 1909, the first Bishop of Prince Albert, Albert Pascal O.M.I, came to bless the statue and the grotto, and on that same occasion inaugurated the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. The crowd was estimated at two thousand persons.

Father Delmas in 1916 had a nave built which gave cover for three thousand persons seated.

In the year 1922 there assembled a multitude of eight thousand which was due in part to the presence of the new Bishop of Prince Albert, Joseph Prud'homme who made his first visit to the shrine. On this occasion he spoke of Father Fourmond who promoted the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes in his diocese: "We cannot ignore the privations of those pioneers of faith, of those valiant missionaries who devoted themselves for the evangelization of the first inhabitants of the country. We, who reap the fruits of their labour, have not the right to forget them. We should take note of the lessons of a past, so full of self-denial and sacrifices."

In 1939 Father George-Marie Latour O.M.I, principal of the Indian School at Duck Lake took charge of the Sanctuary. He was responsible for the building in 1951 of a new Grotto and Sanctuary much vaster and more solid than the old.



Outside view of the New Grotto built in 1950.

Year: 1950

Place Name: St. Laurent

The New Grotto was built in 1950 by Father Campagna.

The number of persons who claim to have been cured, relieved, or answered is great. Every year, some claim to have been cured, or helped by the Blessed Virgin either at the occasion of the pilgrimage at St. Laurent, or during a novena of prayers made at home.

Nothing has really risen from the ruins of the old mission except perhaps a few board shelters to sell souvenirs and food to the pilgrims. It is still the wilderness of Father Fourmond's time. Yet every July 15 and August 15, small groups appear during the afternoon. Some arrived in vehicles of all kinds and others on foot fulfilling vows or doing penance, till the whole plateau of St. Laurent is alive with a mass of humanity. As evening draws on, the sanctuary begins to glow with all the votive candles. A Candle lit procession of pilgrims does the route of the cross. Many pilgrims hold vigil all night in prayer in the grotto while others sing refrains to Our Lady. Meanwhile the priests wait in their confessionals set against the surrounding trees to give the rite of reconciliation.

In the morning Masses are celebrated in many languages and the preachers extol the glories of Mary. The High Mass usually celebrated by the Bishop of Prince Albert is a sign for all the pilgrims who assemble before the grotto. In the afternoon is the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament which after a short halt of repose returns to the grotto where the blessing of the sick is held. Then the grotto resounds with the voices of pilgrims who declare their profession of faith aloud. The priests bless the containers of water from the spring which the pilgrims bring home for their pious use. The veneration of Mary, Mother of God under the title "Our Lady of Lourdes" is healthy and strong in St. Laurent, despite years of decay and neglect, skepticism and materialism.



Long may we hear ringing in Saskatchewan River Hills the joyous acclamation:

“Immaculate Mary, thy praises we sing,  
Who reignest in splendor with Jesus, our King.  
Ave, Ave, Ave Marie!  
Ave, Ave

Now, too, under the direction of Pope John Paul II we would do well to reassert our devotion to Mary, Mother of God, copying the zeal and

reverence of the early missionaries of Mary Immaculate and the pilgrims. Only the future will show whether we will be faithful to the favours God has bestowed on us. The goodness of Mary is unlimited. He who trusts in her will never be confounded. Let our trust not fail.

Sponsor

“Our Lady of the Prairies Foundation” (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan)



Pilgrims of the Past

Year: 1952

Place Name: St. Laurent

In 1952 Altar of Repose on the old processional route, up the hill.